

**CLAIM STATUS:**

Claim 1 (Cancelled)

Claim 4 (New) A method for exchanging data between an operating tool or a control unit and a plurality of field devices via a communication network, comprising the steps of:

storing corresponding device drivers for the field devices, whereby a device driver encapsulates all data and functions of the corresponding field device and whereby the device driver provides a graphical user interface;

providing an encryption driver which is embodied as an independent and separately exchangeable software module stored in the operating tool or the control unit;

encrypting the data in the encryption driver via a corresponding algorithm;

exchanging the encrypted data between the operating program stored in the operating tool or the control unit and the field device with the aid of a communication driver; and

unencrypting the exchanged data in the field device and executing the corresponding commands.

Claim 2 (Currently mended) The method as claimed in claim 4, wherein: the software module meets the FDT/DTM standard.

Claim 3. (Currently amended) The method as claimed in claim 4, further comprising the step of:

providing an FDT frame application which runs in the control unit which serves as runtime environment for the software module.